

# By the Woman Who Fed t

Georgette Leblanc  
Maeterlinck  
Surprising  
Most Extraordinary



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"I could not repress a little cry of joy and exclaimed: 'Oh! what happiness! He is young!'"

## By Georgette Leblanc CHAPTER V.

She Meets Maurice Maeterlinck.  
(Continued from Last Sunday)

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I TRAVELLED to Brussels and entered on the operative engagement which I had accepted at nearly half the salary of my Parisian engagement, simply to obey the mysterious summons to be near Maurice Maeterlinck. I was to make my debut in "La Navarraise" within fifteen days. My great friend, the illustrious Massenet, was directing my rehearsals of his opera, and I concentrated myself intensely on making a success of this undertaking.

For one reason or another my debut at the Theatre de la Monnaie in Brussels always seems in my memory to have been my first, my true, debut. Perhaps it was because of the presence of Massenet and his so inspiring advice. Perhaps it was because this role required exclusively passion and sincerity.

The day after my debut I was universally praised by critics, public and artists. I was adopted with enthusiasm by a public that loved me and understood me.

During the early days of my residence I called at the office of a distinguished lawyer, whom I had already met, and who I knew was a great friend of the cleverest artists, writers and poets of Belgium.

Without beating about the bush I told him why I had given up my brilliant engagement in Paris, but I must admit that I blushed as I uttered the almost sacred name of Maeterlinck, when I revealed my tremendous desire to meet him.

"Do you perhaps know him?" I asked with trembling hesitation.

"Why, yes, of course!" he answered with a carelessness that seemed to me to border on sacrilege. Still trembling, I told him that I would like to meet him very soon.

"But what can you want with him?" he asked. "He is a kind of wild man who rarely leaves his country district."

I hesitated a little, feeling unconsciously the extraordinary character of my conduct. Perhaps its strangeness then occurred to me for the first time, for up to then I had kept my thoughts to myself, and now I found it was necessary to confide in another. Not being able to think of any other explanation that would sound reasonable, I recklessly uttered the whole truth. These were the astonishing words that I uttered:

"If he thinks as he writes, he is certainly the man I must love!"

The refined and elderly lawyer was seized by a hearty fit of laughter that finally caused me serious distress. But I had taken the fateful step and I could not retreat. I begged, I insisted that he should help me.

Georgette Leblanc, realizing the first part of her dream in the crystal globe that some day she should meet Maeterlinck, the idol of her dreams and genius.

"I beg you, monsieur," I said, "not to consider merely what appears strange and unusual in my proceeding. You are a lawyer and you know better than anyone how full of difficulties and complications is life for a woman. Mine has been particularly hard until now, perhaps because I did not always have the strength to avow what I wanted. When one fears to cause unhappiness to others it is hard to reveal one's self. I have never dared to do it, but now, monsieur, it is very different. Only think, monsieur, what happiness it would be for me—and!"

I blushed again, not venturing to complete my phrase.

Having grown calmer by this time, the distinguished lawyer regarded me with a kindly, paternal smile.

"How old are you, my child?" he inquired.

"Twenty years, monsieur," I said, not daring to confess how young I was for fear that it would decide him to thwart my plans. "I have been married for a few months only. That is why they sometimes call me madame, but it is not strictly correct. I did not love my husband—it would be too much to explain everything to you, but believe me that it is a pure young girl who speaks to you, and who confides to you in all sincerity of heart her beautiful dream."

### Her First Evening With Maeterlinck

I could say no more for the moment. As the lawyer did not speak for a time a new fear entered my mind.

"Is he married?"

The lawyer began to laugh again, and in his playful mind a new idea seemed to be forming.

"Ah, then you know nothing about him?" he asked.

"No, nothing whatever, monsieur," I answered frankly.

"Then, of course," he continued, "you do not know that he is a feeble old man."

As I heard these words the keen professional face before me, the desk that separated me from him, the window on my right which threw its light on me, the big fireplace at the back of the room where the fire was burning brightly, the walls, the pictures—all suddenly began to dance and whirl about me, but I pulled myself together sufficiently to reply:

"Very well, monsieur; if he is an old man I will be a daughter to him."

As I spoke I rose and stretched out my hand to him.

"And now, monsieur, are you willing to assist me?"

He reflected for a few moments and then said:

"You are in luck. While I was listening to you I was trying to think how I could attract our poet to my house as soon as possible. Then I suddenly recalled that he

would be here in Brussels the day after to-morrow.

"Our wonderful wild man is obliged to come to Brussels the day after to-morrow to be present at a piece which he has just translated and which is to be played at the Theatre du Parc. I shall send him a note this evening to come and take supper after the performance with me and a few of our best friends. You will come, my dear child, and afterward—afterward I leave things to the goodness of God!"

As I went away from the lawyer's house I felt indescribably happy. As I crossed the old courtyard, where the grass grew between the stones, I murmured to myself:

"The goodness of God!"

Yes, I had now completed the first act of my drama.

The hours seemed to me very long as I waited for the day after to-morrow. The question of the dress I should wear excited me enormously, as you will guess. I consulted my mirror unceasingly. I realized, indeed, that my blond hair was not as blond as that of the Princess Maleine, nor as long as that of the little princess and did they not conceal within their depths as much romance!

In vain I put on and took off and altered my dresses. I wanted to appear to him like one of the heroines of his poems and I found it hard to satisfy my own conceptions. Finally, at the last moment, I purchased a fabric, at once sumptuous and flowing, that seemed to me ideal. I planned a picturesque mediaeval sort of costume. I draped it upon my figure with studied carelessness and threw over my shoulders a large cloak of dark velvet.

Upon my curling locks I fixed two phosphorescent wings, kept in place by an almost invisible golden thread, which also held a diamond in the centre of my forehead. At this period it was considered strange in any woman not to follow the prevailing mode, whose exigencies, by the way, were much more unbecoming than at present. I shall not astonish you when I say that I was considered very bizarre in my way of dressing. My friends laughed at me in a good-natured way, and they had already hinted to Maeterlinck that he was about to meet his famous

Georgette in her costume in "The Blue Bird," showing perfect happiness.

IN the entire literary world of to-day there is probably no figure so conspicuous as Maurice Maeterlinck, the Belgian poet, novelist, playwright and mystic philosopher. And wherever the "Belgian Shakespeare" is known the poet's distinguished wife, Madame Georgette Leblanc Maeterlinck, has long been known and admired.

The literary and dramatic world knows that Georgette Leblanc, artiste, singer, actress, authoress and beauty, was Maeterlinck's inspiration. Not until the beautiful Georgette came into his life did the genius of Maeterlinck rise to its full richness.

When the poet conceived the idea for his famous "Blue Bird" it was Georgette who labored with him to work out the lines of the play, and it was Georgette who made its production possible and took a leading role in interpreting his dramatic masterpiece for the public.

But Georgette Leblanc was not Maeterlinck's wife. She was never married to Maeterlinck. "Mrs. Maurice Maeterlinck" she was known to the world of art, literature and culture—but it was a title assumed for the convenience of the poet.

Maeterlinck himself presented her to his friends as "Madame Maeterlinck," and she presided at his home, he wrote her, addressing her always as his wife, but never married her.

When the time came for Maeterlinck to marry he led to the altar, not Georgette Leblanc, his inspiring companion and helpmate, but a child, utterly lacking the rare qualities which Georgette possessed in such full measure. And when recently the great poet

Byzantine princess in the flesh.

My attention was entirely occupied by the wonderful play in which the genius of the translator was apparent, and I had no time to look for him in the audience until all was over and my kind host hurried me away to the supper party at his house.

I entered the drawing-room trembling at the thought that at last I was about to meet the famous and gifted old man whose work we had been applauding. Unknown to me, the others had been informed of the deception that had been practised upon me. Full of malicious curiosity, they clustered between the doorway and the fireplace where Maeterlinck was standing.

He was smoking his pipe, according to his habit, and on his shoulders he wore a rough coat, while all the others were in evening dress. He had hidden himself during the performance, and now he stood there alone and indifferent, leaning on the mantelpiece, while the eyes of everybody were turned toward him. The lawyer stepped toward me, and, pointing to Maeterlinck with a malicious smile, said:

"Madame, permit me to present your poet to you."

I could not repress a little cry of joy, and stepping back a few paces I exclaimed:

"Oh, what happiness! He is young!"

Maeterlinck was embarrassed and confused by this way of apostrophizing him, which he naturally could not understand. He scarcely spoke and seemed desirous of hiding himself. But when we all took our places at the supper table he was seated opposite me, and then for the first time our eyes met.

### Her First Visit to Maeterlinck

From that moment I listened to nothing but his sacred words. They were few and quietly spoken, but there was an indescribable fascination about them. He had a strange way of answering questions that were put to him, as though he spoke in spite of himself, and at the same time he lowered his eyes. His voice was deep and veiled and his movements slow. I never grew tired of analysing his features, which seemed to change their expression at every moment, as if an invisible light were mysteriously playing upon them. In vain I sought to fix the image which I wished to carry away with me. I noted in my thoughts that his eyes were of an uncertain blue, the cheeks rather bony, the chin well rounded, the hair of chestnut color above the broad square forehead, the mouth